

Wycombe Wanderers have done it again!

WYCOMBE Wanderers have done it again. Since the arrival of manager Brian Lee some six years ago the footballing public of High Wycombe have been utterly spoilt with unqualified success and the first half of this 1974 season has been no exception (writes **STUART EARP**).

This year it has been the F.A. Cup, going one better than last season when they lost in the second round. Now Wanderers have broken all the club records by reaching the magical round three and a game against Jack Charlton's Middlesbrough that will, no doubt, be remembered for years.

Full credit must go to the players but the men behind the triumphs of recent years are Lee and John Reardon, his assistant. Lee arrived in 1969, that year Wanderers finished Isthmian League runners-up. Next term they won it and the year after retained it (throwing in an Amateur Cup semi-final for good measure). The Berks and Bucks Senior Cup — a paltry competition compared with the later success — was won the following season and then Brian clinched the first ever Rothmans Isthmian League championship. Also the club reached the second round of the F.A. Cup for the third time with a heroic 3-1 triumph over Newport.

Still more success was to follow this season. Having come through the four qualifying rounds, Wanderers overcame a spirited challenge against Cheltenham — probably the best footballing game this season — and then drew 0-0 at home to Bournemouth.

The gate for that match, which would have attracted a full capacity on many amateur grounds, was 7,424. By many standards a grand figure. For this type of match, however, Wycombe deserved the 12,000 limit they had put on the gate. They didn't get it. And the reason is simple enough . . . Wycombe spectators have had

has been on his very best form. Who will forget his saves against Cheltenham or that double effort in the closing stages against Bournemouth?

Phillips' arrival meant Dave Bullock, one of the heroes of last year's title winning team, had to drop out. A great competitor, Dave has resisted the temptation of a place with

forward, Alexander looks a class player, although the finish has yet to materialise.

Comparing the goalscoring feats of this time last year, the question has to be asked why the front runners are not slotting them home as regularly this season. There are several reasons; the main one being the form of Tony Horsman and

Sutton early on, has yet to fulfil his promise.

Having looked at the players, the question must now be asked, what chance have the Blues of retaining their title? The answer, I feel, is a slim one. The goals are not going in the way they were last year — they have only one £40 bonus this term — and the Blues have drawn too many games. Apart from that, Enfield are 10 points clear at the time of writing, while Ilford and Leatherhead both look menacing in the following positions.

Obviously, the two matches with Enfield will be crucial but Wanderers cannot afford to slip up as they did at Kingstons recently or drop points like they did against Hayes.

It must be stated, however, that Wycombe were in a similar position last year and still took the championship in that amazing finish to the season. It could be done again.

There are not many people reflecting on their league performances, though. Most are looking towards that game against Middlesbrough. It is that Cup run that has captured the imagination of thousands.

Few would have dreamt of Middlesbrough on that steamy day at Marlow in the first qualifying round on September 14, but once again the Blues have won themselves a slice of history.

SATURDAY'S FIXTURES

F.A. Cup, third round proper: Wycombe Wanderers v Middlesbrough (2 p.m.).
Athenian League, Division One: Marlow v Redhill (3 p.m.).
Spartan League: Amersham v Crown and Mar, Farnham v Chalfont St. Peter (2.15 p.m.).

BLUES' HALF-TERM REVIEW

more than their fair share of glory. This Middlesbrough game is yet another feather in their cap and this time, that 12,000 limit must be reached.

League attendances, in national trend, have dropped. True, Wycombe have not been recording those four, five or six goal victories this term but the football has been there for all to enjoy. It seems a shame the sporting public do not fully appreciate the attacking sporting and thoroughly entertaining soccer their home club produces.

The season started for the Blues with the arrival of several new faces. Alan Phillips, the Hendon and Welsh international signed on as did an exciting prospect in Howard Kennedy. Later Gary Hand joined from Ilford, where, incredibly, he was unable to gain a regular place. He has been very welcome at Loakes Park and along with Keith Mead, has been the outstanding defender.

While mentioning the defence, no review would be complete without a word or two about John Maskell. The goalkeeper has had his critics in the past but this year — his 12th with Wycombe Wanderers — he

almost any other club. Phillips, meanwhile, has been the captain and shows his class when needed most. Paul Birdseye has improved steadily and ironed out his weakness in the air while Paul Griffiths has also come on no end.

Many looked to Kennedy as a ready-made replacement for the inimitable Larry Pritchard in midfield at the start of the term. No one could do that. But Kennedy tops the goalscoring charts at present, uses the ball well and has probably the hardest shot in the side since the days of Paul Bates. His midfield compatriot, Terry Reardon, has failed to consistently find his best, delighting the crowd one minute and forcing groans the next. On his day, however, this player is capable of destroying defences and his experience and grit in midfield is invaluable.

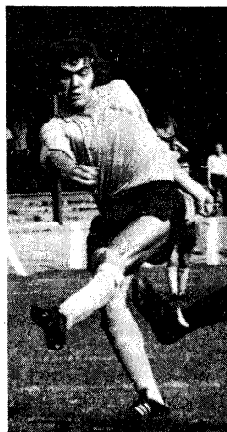
One of the most improved players must be Mick Ilford. There is nothing better than to see him in full flight. Although tending to drift out of some games this term, he is nevertheless Wycombe's potential match winner every time. The bearded Dave Alexander also joined this season but has yet to play a full league game. When going

Keith Searle.

Distribution from midfield has not been as good as last year but both Horsman and Searle have struggled to find their top form. "Bodger", as always, shows his marvellous flicks and touches but his lack of pace has been more evident this year. Recently, however, he has been knocking in the goals again like clockwork and his effort at Bournemouth will long be remembered.

The injury that cruelly hit Searle at Walthamstow certainly took its toll. At the time, Keith was the finest centre forward on the Isthmian circuit. He still shows some of the glimpses of that form but again, lack of pace has affected this game.

The tag of "most improved player" must go to Steve Perrin. Now stronger, quicker and more experienced, Steve is a class striker with considerable ability and has caused the best defences real problems this season. Dylan Evans has lacked consistency while the brief glimpse of 'keeper Brian Stevenon at Ilford, is not a fair performance to judge him on. Graham Mackenzie waits patiently for his mid-week games but after a fine match at



STEVE PERRIN
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KEITH HEAD
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